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THAT the Thanks of the House be given to Dr. Birch, for the Sermon by him preached before this House yesterday, at St. Margarets Westminster : And that he be desired to Print the same : And that Sir Thomas Dyke and Mr. Hungerford do acquaint him therewith.

Paul Fodrell, Cl. Dom. Com.

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A
S E R M O N

Preached before the Honourable

H o u s e o f C o m m o n s ,

A T

St Margarets Westminster,

J A N U A R Y 30. 1694.

By *Peter Birch, D. D. Chaplain in
Ordinary to Their Majesties.*

L O N D O N ,

Printed for *Tho. Nott* in the *Pall mall*,
and are to be Sold by *Randal Tay-
lor*, near *Stationers-hall*. 1694.

A
C H A P T E R

THE HISTORY OF THE

REIGN OF QUEEN ELIZABETH

THE THIRD PART

CONTINUING THE HISTORY

OF THE REIGN OF QUEEN

ELIZABETH

BY JAMES SPEDDING

IN FIVE VOLUMES

VOLUME THE FIFTH

2 SAM. I. 21.

*Ye Mountains of Gilboa let there be no dew,
neither let there be rain upon you, nor
fields of offerings: for there the shield of
the mighty is vilely cast away, the shield
of Saul, as though he had not been anoint-
ed with oyl.*

THIS is part of the lamentation of *David* over *Saul*, and an expression of his grief so raised and extraordinary, as nothing but the greatness of the occasion could excite, nor any raptures but those of a King and Prophet present us with.

It is over the fall of a Prince, that was literally the Lords anointed and his Successor, or if any prefer the being Vicgerents to their inferiors, that was the desire and choice of the people; *Saul* being advanced to the throne when

Israel first grew weary of the Theocracy, and desired a King after the form of other nations. Besides that after his unction he had a new heart given him, and was numbred among the Prophets; so that his obsequies were fit only to be solemniz'd by one like himself, the known inheritor of his Kingdom and Spirit. To whose tears also it must needs have been a considerable addition, that he had then raised an army, which though not immediately employed against his master, yet we find offered unto *Abish*, and that it made the rear of his battel when he went out to fight against *Israel*; and therefore it is no wonder, that he whose heart smote him for offering violence but to the skirt of his Prince's robe, should be overwhelmed at his death.

But besides these appropriate circumstances, there are sufficient in this pathetick story to warrant our Churches accommodating it to the present solemnity. For although few Texts of Scripture are exactly suited to those of providences, and much less to that crime without a precedent, in which all the villanies of our late confusions were compleated, yet does this noble instance

instance of *David's* piety to *Saul* teach us that our duty is practicable, even against an apparent interest, and the highest provocations.

We need not then spend time in making out the parallel, or enquire whether God really suffered his anointed to fall by the hands of one he had disobediently saved ; it is enough for us that *David* believed the *Amalekites* relation, and that his carriage herein is recorded for our example, to guide posterity in the same course. He was at that time under more true discouragements from his duty, than ever any rebel since invented false ones ; he had a just declared title to succeed, had saved the honour of his Country, and was the darling of his people, and yet had grievances alone to plead, where he had merited rewards. For he was openly persecuted by *Saul*, with a malice that seemed equally incapable of end or increase ; one that all his services and submissions together could never allay, that had endangered the life of *Jonathan* for interceding, and could ungratefully welcome him from the slaughter of the *Philistines*, with seeking to strike him to the wall with a Javelin : that as himself complains, pursued him like a Par-

tridge on the mountains, and made his days as
a shadow that declineth.

And yet when this heir of the kingdom saw
the Crown and his Enemy fall into his hands to-
gether, he does not basely trample upon his
misfortunes, or draw arguments from provi-
dences to conclude him rejected of God, but
forgetting his revenge, he first vindicates the
majesty of *Saul* by the death of his destroyer,
and then he piously laments over him ; not
with a transient and retired grief, as if he alone
had been concerned, but after the same manner
as the Gospel now provides, that supplications,
prayers and intercessions be made for Kings,
i. e. composed and solemnly performed in our
daily offices ; so he likewise frames this divine
lamentation, enters it in his book of *Jasher*,
where his other hymns and spiritual songs were
written ; and having, according to the use of
ancient times, given it a title from the most
eminent passage, as was the bow of *Jonathan*,
he to make the sorrow universal, commands it
to be taught the children of *Judah* ; that all
might learn with one heart and mouth to weep
over the light and beauty of *Israel*. *Ye moun-*
tains

tains of Gilboa, &c. If the whole earth was once accursed by heaven for the sin of man, 'tis but just that you, O unhappy Mountains, should for ever bid adieu to its blessings, upon which the light of *Isræl* was extinguished; you deserve to lose your fertility, and be given up to perpetual barrenness; and may this expiate, may you rather never more yield an increase sufficient for an offering unto the Lord, than that his heritage should be brought to confusion, and the blood of his anointed be required at our hands.

These two parts therefore, the malediction, and the reason of it: I shall distinctly consider, with relation to the present solemnity. And

1. Of the malediction, *Let there be no dew, nor rain upon you, nor fields of offerings.* This we need not force into a Prophecy, as if no rain or dew had ever since fallen upon Mount *Gilboa*; and much less are we to esteem it only the rage of the Poet, all rapture and hyperbole; for if we pass on to its ground and design, or compare it with other the like passages in several of the Prophets, it will appear so far above a curse of fancy,

fancy and presumption, as to be founded upon one that is real and perpetually threatening. 'Tis comment enough but to repeat that one parallel instance of Job's cursing the time of his birth, c. 3. *Let, saith he, the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said there is a man-child conceived. Let that day be darkness, let not God regard it from above, neither let the light shine upon it. Let darkness and the shadow of death stain it, let a cloud dwell upon it, &c.* All which is not a piece of blasphemy or distrust in God, but a designed demonstration of the bitterness of his troubles, and the contempt he had of that life which sustained them; for Job is before said, c. 1. 21. *not to have charged God foolishly;* he was long since resigned and had commenced the standard of patience. And therefore those who first ignorantly call this murmuring, and then excuse it by infirmity, they might as well apologize for the Saviour of the world himself, who with strong cries prayed the Father that cup might pass from him, to drink of which he came down from heaven.

But if we consider David as a man after God's own heart, and to have been in all the other circum-

circumstances of this story most eminently careful of his duty to *Saul*; then the Text likewise must be interpreted by the same rule as that of *Job*, not as a flight in Poetry, but for a just grief and a depreciation of that guilt wherein the whole land was involved, and which hangs over all Countries, that embrue their hands in the blood of God's Vicegerents.

From all which it seems an easy consequence, that if *David* sorrowed and feared so much, for the death of a King slain in battel and open hostility, if he so carefully propagated his grief, lest the curse should spread and become national, if so high a concern was necessary for one that had been so highly provoked, therefore

1. The like duty is now universal, namely, that we also joyn in an united and public lamentation for that still more innocent blood of the Martyr of this day. And
2. That the neglect of it, and an insensibility of the guilt, will certainly bring upon us the curse insinuated in the Text.

Now both these particulars suppose our sins and our duty to outlive the vulgar opinion; that as some crimes are too great to be expiated by

by the punishment of one only generation, so also there are some duties that survive the party to whom they were due; we do not perform all the last offices to the deceased upon his first interment, but his funerals return upon every instance designed to preserve his memory, and in this sense our Lord's death is said to be still shewed forth, by a commemorative sacrifice, and that it shall be so till he come to judgment. Nay every man that is not ignorant of himself must acknowledge, that the soul is able to produce the same effects by reflex acts as when the object is present to us, so as to fancy a past diversion is to act it over again, and to call back the most trifling endearments of a deceased friend is to make all our sorrows bleed afresh, and to renew those passions we at first entertain'd him with. Upon this at least are built all those commands of meditating, considering, and calling to remembrance things past; as the only true way to be affected with them.

Since then the duty still remains, and that the very presence of this honorable Assembly supposes it, we may reflect on the two principal aggravations of those sufferings we are this day commanded to lament

lament over, to the end we may at this distance pay some faint honours to our late martyr'd Sovereign, and may not be partakers of the sins and the plagues of his murderers. Now the

I. Of these aggravations we may justly esteem the private worth of his person. To form a just Idea of which, and much more to draw his Image, or venture upon his Character, would require a Soul as great as his was; 'twere a profanation in any ruder hand to attempt it, but yet the perfections which were obvious, and within the reach of every the meanest beholder, are sufficient to raise our grief and admiration.

Had all they of his own household been his foes, and conspired to conceal him from the World, yet it must have suspected something great from that blood, in which Nature had united all the gallant dispositions of the chief Christian Families. But when once these had gathered strength, and rendred his manhood as august as his birth, then he appeared with all that was requisite to make him good as a Man, or honourable as a King: There *Plato* might

Have seen Learning on the Throne, and Philosophy in Purple. In him were all those Virtues crowded together and enabled, each of which had eterniz'd its Hero ; he little needed the common allowances that are made to other Sovereigns, from whose faults their very enemies, if honourable ones, use to retire with respect ; for if he had any, they were in those generous excesses of Pardon and Liberality, which distinguish Princes from the vulgar ; that common topic of praising him from comparison, is a real diminution to his greatness ; he that saith he was valiant as *Cæsar*, tells but half the truth, for his Courage was equally great on the Scaffold as in the Field ; he owed not his bravery to passion or example, but his resolution was ever strongest in Retirement, and he shewed most gallantry when he had most leisure to fear. To compare his Temperance or his Contempt of the World to that of a beggarly Philosopher, were to commend his phlegm or his poverty ; but he wanted neither great desires nor great temptations, nor any help of envy to declaim against other mens pleasures, because he could never taste them himself.

As.

As for the meekness of Moses, the patience of Job, and the zeal of Jesus, all these met in his breast, and together made up a perfect man; one that all the industry of his enemies could never search out a plausible accusation against, though their malice pursued him through all the most private actions of his life. The truth is, in him they had nothing to revile but his Virtues, and were it fit to mingle his glory with their reproaches, those could never be so perfectly summd up as in their calumnies; that which they blasphemed for Tyranny, was a Bounty that scattered among them all his Royal Prerogatives; and left them nothing to murder but Himself; If these strangers to a meek and quiet spirit had the insolence to call his a defect of understanding; Obstinacy in their mouths was in him a firmness to his duty, and Superstitious regularity in Devotion. Nothing certainly but their furious zeal durst have stiled him an enemy to Religion, of which his life was the greatest ornament; and his death the most devout example: None else had forehead enough to

pronounce him unworthy to reign, and perhaps in that inglorious quality a Glass was never yet outdone, but by those who have since pretended him unable to write.

Upon the whole matter, if we seriously reflect on the many afflictions which surrounded the head of that excellent Prince, how little he deserved the least of them from any man, ~~may~~ how much otherwise he merited from most of the chief actors; and yet against how many fair hopes they prevailed, and with how many sad circumstances they were increased, as if all that related to him were but so many appendages of his sufferings; but with what an unshaken constancy he bore them all; we must hence conclude, that he was separated by God's especial appointment to give a new example of fortitude to the decaying Virtue of the age, and to confirm the belief of past Miracles to one in which they are ceased.

And thus in King Solomon's phrase it happened to the just man according to the work of the wicked, and we may well take up his Fathers complaint, *How are the mighty fallen,*
and

and the weapons of war perished ! How is the beauty of Israel slain upon thine high places ! Thou, O unnatural country, no longer merits the common blessings of heaven, the rain or the dew, and much less those distinguishing enjoyments, by which it hath hitherto divided thee as well in happiness as in scituation. Why are thine houses yet safe from fear, and the rod of God not upon thee ! Wherefore do the wicked still live, become old and mighty in power ? why are the old arts but still advancing to thy ruine ? but that thou mayest at length meet a vengeance worthy of God, and drink up the dregs of his fury.

2. The other great aggravation of our grief is, that in all the guilty parts of our Sovereign's Martyrdoms his own people had so great a share. I am not ignorant how many scrupulous consciences there are, that are truly tender of nothing but a just reproof ; and how impossible it is for him that tells them the truth not to be accounted an Enemy, and used so upon occasion ; 'twere indeed a mighty step towards their conversion, if those men could bear sound doctrine, who have

have hitherto, like *Pliny's* peevish creatures, had their gall in their ears. But although there is an indemnity for their persons, there is no oblivion indulged their rebellions, we are not bound to spare the crime, or cry peace to the wicked, when God says there is none; and therefore since their general and dreadful impenitences creates a necessity of yearly declaring who were his Murderers, and who still abhor their principles; I hope it will not be interpreted an invective to give this short account of the action.

When therefore the mercy of God had made the goods of our Church pay for the purity of its doctrine, and had advanced a private quarrel into a glorious and public reformation, it was of his permission, who always leaves a way open to punish us without a miracle, that some of its enemies were still left as thorns in our sides, and that out of their corruption were hatch'd a new race of men, who having first sownred all the benignity and generosity of nature, were fit only for executioners, and to be poured out among his other plagues, as a just punishment of our sins.

sies. These, like their brother vermin, were fed only by the rotten members of Church and State; whoever had his ambition checked, or hated the rest of his brethren, knew presently where to herd, and find companions that were friends to none but themselves.

Now of these and the Emissaries that bred them, was made up that rod of God which had been a long time shaked over us, and at length inflicted the stroke. For when once our vice and carelessness had made them considerable, and they could find faults to libel; after a luxurious peace had rendred an honest zeal too weak for a false one, then were all those sects and heresies called out of their several shades, to overspread the land, and mingle a perverse spirit in the midst of our counsels. Hence all our Sovereigns bountiful concessions met evil surmises and seditious comments, and these were feconded by mutinous petitions, seditious clamors, and at length open assaults. When once the age was enough infatuated to give them admittance; this new race of Saints soon preach'd and pray'd it into blood and disobedience;

the

the violation of rights, multiplying widows and orphans, rapine and oppression were to them but sins of daily incursion; and few were backward in doing that work of the Lord negligently.

But these were only the beginnings of sorrow, nor could an unnatural and servile war produce any victories on the side of rebellion but what were so also. With these men to overcome and to extirpate were the same thing, they had just as much reverence for the Crown as they had for the Miter, and kept their oaths to both alike; till at length by such judges as these, the chief pillars of Church and State were made perfect through sufferings; and to fill up the measure of their sins, the great Defender of them both. The subject would be too tedious and ungrateful to recount all the insolencies of his mean conquerors, the melancholy and terrors of a suspected prison, the barbarous forms of such a tryal and such an execution, with the other unparrallel'd circumstances of the crime.

But it is high time to observe, that to the honour of our Church established, and may

it

it so continue, it was no way accessary to this direful fact. She had always the same Enemies and the same fate with her King; they were ever persecuted, oppressed and defamed, and have ever fallen together; her obedience was a nobler thing than to let them perish unattended; and perhaps in the sad instance now before us it was necessary to have her constancy tryed, that so famous an example might guide us hereafter, if ever the like occasion returned.

And yet notwithstanding we were not immediately of accession to so vile an action, our sins contributed to the judgment, and by consequence we are bound to mourn for it. In such a day of rebuke and confusion as this, God particularly takes notice of our behaviour, and sees every mourner in secret: he also beholds the riotous eater of Flesh, and him that drinks Wine, when the Lord calls us to weeping, fasting and mourning. And I hope we shall never forget our interest, by growing weary of the duty.

II. The other general inference from David's malediction, was that without a like serious and particular humiliation, the curse insinuated in the Text will certainly overtake us. The sin indeed is passed away, together with the time in which it was committed ; and there are who seem willing we should forget there was one, but the guilt of it remains, and makes us truly debtors to the justice of God. For if under the Law, the shedding of any innocent blood was so crying a sin, that when the murderer was not known the whole land was responsible, and must be purged by a general Sacrifice ; how unpardonable is it under the Gospel, where he that loveth not his Brother is a murderer , and he that resisteth receiveth to himself damnation, for any to kill and take possession of the Throne ?

Such bold and daring transgressions as these are above the cognizance of an earthly Tribunal, it is God alone who can inflict an equal punishment, and who knows how to supply what is wanting towards expiation.

And

And were it fit for us to pry into the secrets of heaven, we might reasonably ascribe it to an inquisition after this blood, that we so long heard the cries of the oppressed, and there was none to comfort them ; that we beheld Servants on Horses , and Princes walking as Servants on the Earth ; that our Laws , our Liberties , and our Religion , were a prey to such as scoffed at Kings , and made Princes a scorn ; and that after we were restored to them again, by a Miracle as great as our Ingratitude, yet then also God took the Sword into his hand , that he raised up a foreign enemy to make War upon our Coasts , that he sent the Pestilence into our Streets , and a devouring Fire to lay waste our Metropolis.

And is any so blind as not to see this among the causes, why distress and perplexity still remains upon the Nation ? Mens hearts failing them for fear , and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth. Is it not Judgment-like, that our excellent Religion, which hath no foreign dependencies, and whose prosperity

alone is founded on that of our Country ; should yet be forced to truckle either to the practices of *Rome*, or to a riot of Enthusiasts ; and that we are still threatned in their turns, either with no Church at all, or the worst among Christians ? are we not still left open to a bitter and hasty Nation , to land upon our Coasts, and possess the dwelling places which are not theirs ? Are not our very blessings all turned into a curse ? our boasted freedom is now only a liberty to bite and devour one another ; our long cried up liberty of Conscience proves one of Impiety, Licentiousness, and Error, and at best serves for a step to Dominion more than Devotion ; our Laws are indeed open, but to the continual conspiracies of false witnesses against the Lives and Fortunes of the Innocent ; but if the Fountain also is troubled, as the many attempts to clear it insinuate, if there be wickedness in high places, or it were possible to believe the reports, of Patriots that prefer others safety to our own, of Fathers that were never Sons, of Guardians that sell their Trust, or the like Contradictions

ons in Morality, then we may conclude that God's anger is not yet turned away, but his hand stretched out still, and the vengeance impending.

And thus I have attempted some poor account of the malediction, in order to avoid the like; it remains to consider the reason of it, *For there the Shield of the Mighty was
vilely cast away, the Shield of Saul as though
he had not been anointed with Oyl.*

This expression of David's grief we have no reason to ascribe to any personal obligations, and therefore it must be interpreted as a confirmation of the practice of all wise and civilized nations, who have been always so sensible of the advantages of Government, as both to solemnize the birth of their Kings with all the expressions of publick joy, and to attend their deaths with as great demonstrations of mourning. Nor was it anciently esteemed an empty ceremony to have the memory of a judgment preserv'd by a solemnity, but as necessary to imprint a sense of its misery, and to endear the contrary blessing; the multitude being wholly

wholly led by their senses, and the wisest hardly escaping the being affected by them.

We are not then to look upon *David's* action as private only and temporary, which cannot be drawn into example; but it expresses the settled and publick opinion of the whole *Jewish Church*. For he might formerly have as easily cut off *Saul's* head as he did his garment, but that faith *Opitatus*, *Imuit Oleum*, the holy Oil was upon his head, and his character sacred. And I hope we, who pretend to a better information than the *Jews* ever had, shall not be less sound in the doctrine of civil obedience, or think it altered by the late exercise of that provisional power, which is necessarily reserved to a free people upon all extraordinary emergencies. All these are questions of law and constitution, and were of old so little thought to belong unto Divinity, that ours is the first State Schism known in the world; and therefore our Superiors owe very little to the controvertists on either side.

But

But the time allows not a just prosecution of the subject, and much less a digression from it; if then we recollect the whole, we have heard the guilt and still feel the consequences of this wicked action; it hath brought us nigh unto cursing, for it was this villany which first forced the posterity of that pious King out of their Country, and their Religion together, and which, as a consequence of that, hath entailed upon us disputed titles, and for ought yet appears endless wars.

The way then to appease the wrath of God, and to wash out the guilty stain of our Sovereigns blood, is not to unite in forgetting it, or to add impudence to the crime, by seeking to depress his credit, but to make the remembrance of his undeserved sufferings still more solemn and effe-
ctual, that the shame justly due, and so often charged to the account of our Nation for them, may be an instrument to turn us from our transgressions, and make us bring forth fruits meet for repentance. It is yet in the power of an humble repentance to make

make God shine upon our Councils, and go forth with our Armies, and though our short-sighted reason can see nothing before us but blackness and darkness and confusion, yet he can by unforeseen ways easily disperse the storm, and establish our happiness as the strong mountains.

And in order to attain that happy end of our follies, give me leave to conclude with King Solomon's axiom, *Prov. 29. 25. The fear of man bringeth a snare, but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe.* We are fallen into those dregs of time, wherein hypocrisy and profaneness seem to divide the world between them, and all true and unaffected piety is out of countenance; wherein all the sacred ties to our King and Country appear as loose as our manners; and in which that generous honesty and integrity, which was once the glory and the character of our Nation, is all vanished into mean, false and undermining compliances. If then we dare own discouraged Virtues, and would stand in the gap to save the whole from destruction, the true way is not to follow

low a multitude to do evil, or to joyn in those fashionable flatteries that are ruin to the embracers ; much less are we to put any confidence in our selves, whose strength is but weakness, but we are according to the wise mans direction to trust in the Lord, that is, in the constant sense of Holy Writ, to make our ways so direct as may encourage our affiance in him. And if God be for us, who can be against us ? May he therefore endue us all with this wisdom from above, and only true greatness of mind , that we may keep innocency, and do the thing that is right, and this shall bring us peace at the last.

*Now to God the Father, God the Son, and
God the Holy Ghost, be all glory and ho-
nor, world without end, Amen.*

F I N I S.